Minnie Rohrman 1st

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James Russell Lowell

BIOGRAPHY AND SELECTIONS
FROM HIS WRITINGS

WRITTEN ESPECIALLY

FOR SCHOOL READING

BY
THOMAS ARKLE CLARK
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Illustrated

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

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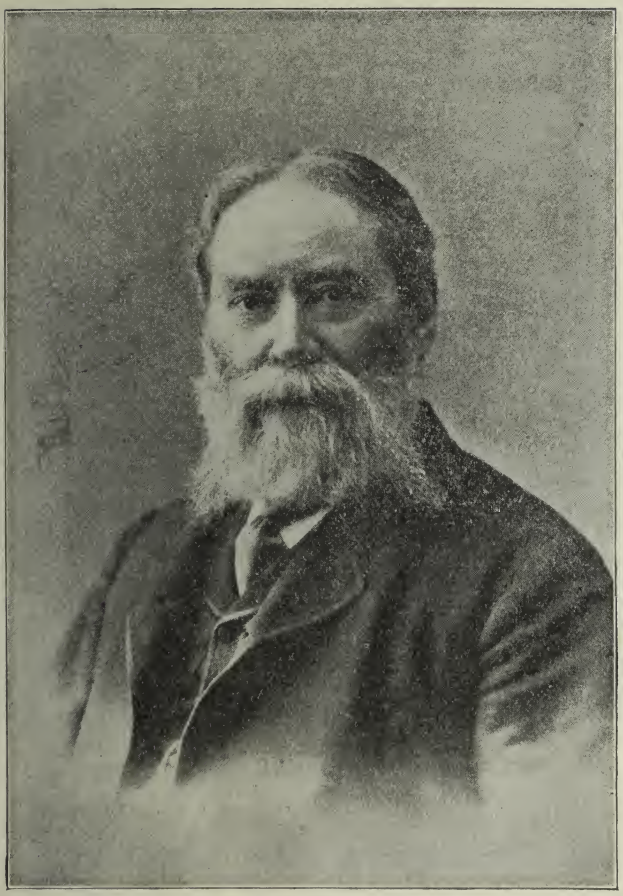
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

1819—1891.



JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

It may justly be said of Lowell that he always remained a boy. It is true that the years came,

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his hair turned gray, and his step grew less sprightly, but he kept always the heart of youth and found it easy to see things from the point of view of the boy. He never lost his interest in the affairs of everyday life, and there was always something new for him to see and to enjoy. It was this quality of youthfulness of spirit that with others made him interesting as a boy and charming as a man.

The ancestors of Lowell had been New Englanders for almost two centuries before he was born. The first one of his relatives who came to this country was Percival Lowell, a merchant from Bristol, England, who settled in Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1639. The Lowell's became known at once for their intelligence, for their interest in education, and for their activity in all directions. They trained their sons rigidly to labor, and when they were old enough they sent them to Harvard College from whence they entered the professions of the ministry or of the law.

John Lowell, the grandfather of James Russell, was a graduate of Harvard College, an officer of the militia at the time of the Revolutionary War, and a delegate to the convention that framed the constitution of Massachusetts. It was he who suggested the phrase "all men are born free and equal" which he hoped would be instrumental in doing away with slavery in the state. He was, in 1789, made United States

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Judge of the District of Massachusetts, yet with all his legal duties he found time to give his aid in the founding of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and occasionally to write a poem or to give a public address. All of his sons graduated from Harvard College. John became a writer of some note; Francis was a successful merchant who founded, and for

ELMWOOD, LOWELL'S HOME.

whom was named, the city of Lowell, Massachusetts; Charles, the father of James Russell, after his graduation, travelled for some time and then was settled over the West Unitarian Church of Boston, where he remained as pastor until his death as a very old man.

Lowell's genius, however, cannot be wholly

attributed to the fact that he had a good ancestry on his father's side. His mother, too, came from good stock, and was a sister of Robert Traill Spence of the United States Navy. It is from her that her son is said to have inherited his vivid imagination and his strong sense of humor. Not many men are so fortunate in their ancestors as was Lowell.

Lowell was born on the 22d of February, 1819, a day of the month which another well known and celebrated American claimed as his birthday. The house in which Lowell first saw the light was a large frame structure standing then on the outskirts of Cambridge and known, then and now, as Elmwood. It was in the midst of a large cultivated field, at that time, and was overhung by huge elm trees, as it is to-day. Nearly half a mile away was Fresh Pond, a small lake on which as a boy Lowell skated in winter, and beyond the house one could catch a view of the Charles River. Just on the edge of the village and some distance away the Craigie House could be seen, famous in the Revolutionary War as the headquarters of Washington, and famous later as the home of the poet Longfellow. But the village has come out to meet the house long since, and the meadows in which Lowell played as a boy have been cut up into building lots and are dotted with houses. The old mansion, built long before Lowell was born, looks sadly out of date

now, in comparison with its more modern neighbors, and the visitor who sees it for the first time wonders questioningly why it is not kept in better repair, as it should be, being the birthplace of so great a man.

Lowell was the youngest of a family of seven children and was naturally petted a great deal. He did not develop mentally with any unusual rapidity, but he was an attractive, handsome boy, whose alertness and sympathetic nature won for him the love of everyone. He was a real boy, too, for though he was quick to learn, yet he liked to play out of doors rather than be shut up in the house to study. Like Holmes, he enjoyed as a boy the long drives which he often took with his father when the elder Lowell went into some of the surrounding villages to exchange Sunday services with other pastors. The little boy was a keen observer, and no doubt the impressions he received of the plain country folk who came out to hear his father preach helped him in later years when he characterized so well the dwellers in New England.

Lowell had always been fond of reading, and the Rev. Charles Lowell had a good many books in his library, some of which his son learned to read very early. He was a wide reader always, and this habit is perhaps responsible for much of his ease and vivacity in conversation. Some of the first money which he earned he spent for books.

At an early age Lowell, like most Cambridge boys, was sent to a dame's school. He did not stay here long, however, for when he was eight or nine years of age, he entered a boarding school kept by a Mr. Wells, who lived near Elmwood. Mr. Wells was an educated Englishman who thought that it did boys no harm to teach them to obey and who was not

THE HOUSE IN WHICH LOWELL LIVED WHILE AT HARVARD.

averse to using the rod, if necessary, to bring about this end. After he had taught his boys to obey, he taught them Latin, and Lowell profited by both lessons. The letters which he wrote to his brother soon after entering this school are very much like those we should expect a boy to write, for they showed a great deal of carelessness both in punctuation and spelling, and they revealed the fact that he

thought much more of play than of study, as perhaps a healthy boy should do.

When Lowell was fifteen years old he was able to pass the freshman examinations for entrance to Harvard College. He was a bashful boy, but he formed friends easily and soon became well known in college. There were few students then to know, however, for the total enrollment did not exceed two hundred. There were not many instructors either, but some of them were men of great ability. Two years after Lowell entered college Longfellow became professor of modern languages.

Lowell enjoyed the life which he lived at college; he was not a close student, but he liked to read, and he enjoyed spending his money for books. Poetry attracted him perhaps more than other things, and he says of himself that he was fondest of the poetry of Spenser. He began to show some poetic ability soon after he entered college; among the first things he did was to translate some odes of Horace. Occasionally he wrote for the college paper, but he did little really worthy of publication until after his graduation. At the beginning of his junior year he was elected a member of the Hasty Pudding Club, a society still existing at Harvard University which young men feel proud to become members of, and he at once was made secretary of the society. He said this honor came to him because he could write poetry, and

the records of the society had to be kept in verse.

He made up his mind while in college to study law and said jokingly that if he did he should be chief justice of the United States. He was elected one of the editors of the Harvardiana, the college magazine at that time, a fact which he said flattered his vanity since he was one of the youngest men in his class. He was never studious in college and was especially negligent during his senior year. He would not apply himself to the necessary studies, so that he was finally suspended for several months and sent to Concord to be tutored by the minister of the town. He had a pretty easy time here, though he did not enjoy it very well and did some serious thinking. He occupied himself part of the time in writing his class poem, which, however, he was not allowed to read, but which was printed and distributed among his classmates. After having received his degree in the fall of 1838 he returned to Cambridge.

His serious thoughts at Concord must have had some effect upon him, for he talked of entering a divinity school and of becoming a minister. He thought more upon the small salary that ministers received than did most people, and said that it was necessary for every man who entered the ministry to have an independent income. He decided in the end that he could not endure the hardships and poverty of a ministers' life and turned his attention

instead to the study of law. One of the things which confirmed him in his resolution to become a lawyer was the fact that he at one time heard Webster making a plea before a Boston jury.

Soon after his graduation he began reading Blackstone and later entered the law school of Harvard University. He often wavered in his purpose and sought comfort in poetry, but he could never quite make up his mind to give up the law. He was successful about 1839 in having some of his poems published, a fact which no doubt encouraged him. He began to think at this time, too, of publishing a volume of poems. One time he would be sure that he was to be a great lawyer, and another time even more certain that he could never come to like it.

He remained at Harvard law school until 1840 when he took the degree of bachelor of laws. He had become by this time more reconciled to the practice of law, especially as it seemed necessary for him to earn his own living on account of the fact that his father had recently lost a great part of the fortune which he possessed. Another fact made it even more necessary for him to earn something, for he had become engaged to Miss Maria White, whom he could not hope to marry until he had a definite means of support for himself and for her. He was indeed very much in love, and so he summoned all his energies to succeed.

Early in 1840 he brought out a small volume

of poems under the title of "A Year's Life." Many of these poems were inspired by the woman he expected to make his wife. Many of them were crude, perhaps, but some still stand among his best and compare favorably with his later verses. He says that Mrs. Longfellow was the first to praise him, and that she so warmed his heart to her that it never grew cold. Though he supposedly kept up the practice of law, yet his chief interest was in literature, and he worked at it quite as much as he did at his profession. He was still practical in many ways, and said once to a friend that besides the business of writing poems he was engaged in raising the finest chickens in the neighborhood.

In 1844 he published a second volume of verse which was so successful that it revealed to him the fact that literature was a more fitting profession for him than the law. He tried his hand at prose, as well as at poetry, and in 1845 published his "Conversations on Some of the Old Poets". He made some money from this publication and said that it made him feel rich. From the beginning he had made more money from writing poetry than had many of the better poets of America. It was in 1843, also, that Lowell did his first real editorial work. He was for a time connected with the Pioneer, a paper for which Poe, Hawthorne, Longfellow and others wrote. The literary venture was, how-

ever, unsuccessful, and the paper soon stopped publication for want of support, leaving its editor to carry a heavy debt.

He was married in December, 1844, and though his income was still small, he was happy. For the first few months after their marriage the young couple lived in Philadelphia, but they returned to Elmwood in June, and in the next December a little daughter was born to them. About this time he published the well known Vision of Sir Launfal. This last poem it is said he composed almost at one sitting, taking little time either to eat or to sleep during the two days he was engaged upon it.

As his fame spread, Lowell's innate modesty revealed itself. He wanted to be known, he said, for his real worth, but he disliked much to be over-praised for external qualities, even though they might appear to be attractive ones. He said that he would have given half his life if he might have shirked upon someone else the praise and flattery that people generally think to be the pleasantest part of a literary reputation.

We get the most complete impression of Lowell's character from his letters. In these he tells us that putting off things was his fault, and that he really seldom liked to write. He put off writing the poems or the articles that he had promised, just as many of us weaker mortals too often do, until he had to hurry to get

them done in time. His letters reveal his stronger characteristics, also; his practical good sense, his versatility, his tenderness, his loyalty to all his friends, and all the qualities which show him to be a real human being like the rest of us.

The subject of slavery was being widely discussed during Lowell's early manhood and he soon allied himself with the anti-slavery cause. In 1846 he was writing articles for the London Daily News and for the Anti-Slavery Standard of New York. For this work which he did for the Standard he received ten dollars a week, a sum which helped him much at a time when he found it hard to live. Though he felt that he should not take money when he was supporting a principle, yet he had no means of living unless he did so. It was at this time, or about this time, also, that there appeared in the Boston Courier the first of his Bigelow Papers. These papers were written in the Yankee dialect by an alleged Mr. Hosea Bigelow, a Yankee farmer, and were edited by Homer Wilbur, A. M., pastor of the first church at Jaalam. By these sketches Lowell hoped to express the feelings which he had against slavery and the conduct of the Mexican War, and he thought these feelings could be better expressed and would appeal to a greater number of people if he put his thoughts into the mouth of a common man. The papers were witty, scholarly, and showed

the keenest judgment of human nature. Their simplicity, and the fact that they were written in dialect made Lowell one of the strongest opponents of slavery America has ever had. He wrote anonymously because he said he wished slavery to have as many enemies as possible, and the general public already knew that Lowell was opposed to slavery. It was a source of great amusement to him to hear the discussions which were provoked by these papers. Some of the people were sure that he had written them; others were free to express the opinion that he could not have done such work.

He had a hard time during the years immediately succeeding his marriage, but this fact did not weigh upon him. He was pretty poor for several years and was forced to depend for his living almost entirely upon the income he derived from what he wrote, and this was often small; but he kept his youthful spirits. He says of himself that he felt like a boy behind a bearded visor and that he could not come to consider himself anything but a boy. He seems never to have been despondent, never to have lost heart no matter how things were going. His natural cheerfulness seems always to have been a sure cure for the blues, and no man can read what he wrote without feeling that it is a very delightful thing to live and to be able to work. He said that he was always needing

money, but that no man could, when necessary, get on with less than he.

In 1851 he and his wife made a trip to Europe. His second daughter had recently died, Mrs. Lowell's health, at its best poor, was now very frail, and it was hoped that the change might bring about an improvement. They were absent for a year and a half, traveling through southern and western Europe, returning home in the fall of 1852. Within a year Mrs. Lowell died, and the poet was left alone. He had depended much upon his wife, to whom he constantly referred in his letters, and her death left him for a time almost stranded. He still had one little daughter, however, and work helped him to forget his sorrows. We find little in his correspondence to show his grief, for even in his greatest trials his cheerful nature asserted itself.

In 1855, on the resignation of Longfellow, Lowell was made professor of modern languages at Harvard University. Only two men had filled the position before him, George Ticknor and Longfellow. Each of these had done a great work for which he was ably fitted. Though Lowell's training had been excellent, he felt that if he were to make an equally good record, he must be prepared as well as possible. He therefore went abroad again for two years of study before beginning his work. He spent his time in Italy, France and Spain, where he became pretty thoroughly acquainted with the

literatures and the languages of these countries.

As an instructor, he did as much as anyone in America to arouse interest in modern European literature. His classes were most popular, for he was sympathetic, witty, and original in his methods, so that he held the attention even of the indifferent students. Like most modest men, he was often in doubt as to the efficiency of his work, and labored hard over the lectures which he gave. He did not have the reputation of making students work extremely hard, though few left his classes without having been stimulated to think and to act. Here, as elsewhere, he did not always take things seriously, for he could seldom resist the temptation to joke or to make the play upon words which was so easy for him. He was a discerning critic, fair, and singularly pertinent in what he had to say; he is still counted among the best critics America has ever known.

In 1857 the Atlantic Monthly was founded. Holmes, Longfellow and Emerson were interested in it, and contributed to it, but Lowell was the first editor. The year that he took up the work of this magazine he was married for the second time. A few years later, with Professor Charles Eliot Norton, he became editor of the North American Review. The Kansas struggle of 1856–1858 interested him much and called forth a number of articles from his pen. At the beginning of the Civil War he was led to

revive Mr. Hosea Bigelow, who had had so much to say on the Mexican War, and who had said it so effectively.

The second series of papers was quite as good as the first had been and aroused the attention of readers both in America and in Europe. Throughout the years which followed the opening of the war, he wrote constantly and vigorously. His Commemoration Ode, written in 1865, has been called the noblest elegy in America. It is written in memory of the soldiers who went to the war from Harvard College. He had begun before this time to find existence more easy than it had been in preceding years. He was paid liberally for his poems, though his books were not yet having a large sale. Though he was not niggardly, he liked to make money. In 1865 he says he was getting one hundred dollars for each of the shorter poems he was writing and twice that much for the longer ones. He said of himself that his luck was a puzzle to him.

In 1877 Mr. Lowell was appointed by President Hayes minister to Spain, a place which he held until 1880, when he was made minister to England. He enjoyed his life at Madrid on account of the fact that he was thoroughly interested in the Spanish language. In London he showed his ready wit and his diplomacy and gave to the English people a higher idea of what a true American gentleman is than they had

ever had before. This country has never been more honorably represented in England than by Lowell. He was a graceful orator as well as a man of culture and of sense. One of his best known addresses was delivered in Westminster Abbey on the occasion of the unveiling of the bust of the poet Coleridge, in 1885. His return to this country at the close of his term of office was the cause of much regret on the part of all American citizens who had watched his career as a public man. English people had also recognized his worth; the University of Oxford conferred upon him the degree of D. C. L., and Cambridge University made him an LL. D. He was also elected rector of the University of St. Andrews, an honor which is not often given to Americans. In 1884 Harvard had also conferred upon him the degree of LL. D., so that he had honor and titles enough for a few years.

On his return to America he resumed his work at Harvard University and took up his residence with his daughter Mrs. Edward Burnett at Southborough, Massachusetts. Things were not quite the same to him as before he went away, as they never are to any human being who separates himself for a time from his friends, but he felt the same love of freedom, the same regard for his country, and the same intense interest in literature which he had always had. He was our best example of an ideal American man of letters, broadminded,

well trained, versatile, and able to do many things excellently. He was equally distinguished as a poet, a critic, a scholar, an essayist, and as a diplomat.

Lowell never really gave up his active life; though his years increased yet he never seemed to take note of the passage of time. Neither as a speaker nor as a writer did his power seem to wane. Until his death he remained a lover of books. Not only was he fond of them for their own sake, but he loved equally well to sit before the open fire and read. Though he had more books than most literary men ever collect, yet the greater part of his library, it is said, showed the mark of much use. He read widely and traveled in many countries, the languages and literatures of which he knew well, but few men were so little changed by travel in their attitude toward their own country as he, and few men remained so truly American.

As old age came on, he perhaps stayed within doors more regularly than he had done before; he liked to hear the logs crackling in the fire place a little better than in former years, as he held his open book in his hand, but the difference seemed to end there. He could never work constantly; he had to wait until he felt like it, and then he seemed to be able to summon all his powers and to write with an unusual speed. He seldom wrote a poem before it was promised to be done, and his lectures were often

not prepared until just before the class period in which they were to be delivered.

The last few years of his life were quiet ones. In 1887 he visited England again where he was received with the enthusiasm that his work as minister had won for him. Everywhere he was paid the highest honors that the people could bestow upon him.

He did not live at Elmwood for some time after the death of Mrs. Lowell, but in 1889 he returned to the old house, where he had been born and where his childhood had been spent, to pass the rest of his days. Here, in August, 1891, he passed away, having earned the right to be named among the most versatile and the most characteristic Americans.

Lowell's genius is so many sided that one can well call him great. He was the most thoroughly unselfish of men, always willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others, yet commonly shrewd enough to judge correctly when self-sacrifice was wise. As a writer he had the widest range in his literary style, and did well perhaps more things than any other American. His knowledge was so great, his resources so boundless, that he was no doubt hindered from doing any one thing as well as he might have done it, had he had fewer talents.

All his work is full of life and shows his originality and naturalness of method. He is always, even when writing in dialect, a master

of words, and always reveals the instincts of a scholar. He perhaps shows his greatest genius in his prose essays, but he has gained his greatest popularity through his humorous presentation of the Yankee character speaking in the New England dialect, as seen in both series of the Bigelow Papers.

Thomas Arkle Clark,
University of Illinois.

SELECTIONS FROM JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

THE HERITAGE.

I.

The rich man's son inherits lands,
And piles of brick, and stone, and gold,
And he inherits soft white hands,
And tender flesh that fears the cold,
Nor dares to wear a garment old;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

II.

The rich man's son inherits cares;
The bank may break, the factory burn,
A breath may burst his bubble shares,
And soft, white hands could hardly earn
A living that would serve his turn;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

III.

The rich man's son inherits wants,
His stomach craves for dainty fare;
With sated heart, he hears the pants
Of toiling hinds with brown arms bare,
And wearies in his easy-chair;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

IV.

What doth the poor man's son inherit?

Stout muscles and a sinewy heart,
A hardy frame, a hardier spirit;
King of two hands, he does his part
In every useful toil and art;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

V.

What doth the poor man's son inherit?
Wishes o'erjoyed with humble things,
A rank adjudged by toil-won merit,
Content that from employment springs,
A heart that in his labor sings;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

VI.

What doth the poor man's son inherit?
A patience learned of being poor,
Courage, if sorrow come, to bear it,
A fellow-feeling, that is sure
To make the outcast bless his door;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

VII.

Oh, rich man's son! there is a toil
That with all others level stands;
Large charity doth never soil,
But only whitens, soft white hands,—
This is the best crop from thy lands;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Worth being rich to hold in fee.

VIII.

Oh, poor man's son! scorn not thy state;
There is worse weariness than thine,
In merely being rich and great;
Toil only makes the soul to shine,
And makes rest fragrant and benign;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Worth being poor to hold in fee.

IX.

Both, heirs to some six feet of sod,
Are equal in the earth at last;
Both, children of the same dear God,
Prove title to your heirship vast
By record of a well-filled past;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Well worth a life to hold in fee.

TO THE DANDELION.

I.

Dear common flower, that grow'st beside the way,
Fringing the dusty road with harmless gold,
First pledge of blithesome May,
Which children pluck, and, full of pride uphold,
High-hearted buccaneers, o'erjoyed that they
An Eldorado in the grass have found,
Which not the rich earth's ample round
May match in wealth, thou art more dear to me
Than all the prouder summer-blooms may be.

II.

Gold such as thine ne'er drew the Spanish prow
Through the primeval hush of Indian seas,
Nor wrinkled the lean brow
Of age, to rob the lover's heart of ease;
'T is the Spring's largess, which she scatters now
To rich and poor alike, with lavish hand,
Though most hearts never understand
To take it at God's value, but pass by
The offered wealth with unrewarded eye.

III.

Thou art my tropics and mine Italy;
To look at thee unlocks a warmer clime;
The eyes thou givest me
Are in the heart, and heed not space or time:
Not in mid June the golden-cuirassed bee
Feels a more summer-like warm ravishment
In the white lily's breezy tent,
His fragrant Sybaris, than I, when first
From the dark green thy yellow circles burst.

IV.

Then think I of deep shadows on the grass,
Of meadows where in sun the cattle graze,
Where, as the breezes pass,
The gleaming rushes lean a thousand ways,
Of leaves that slumber in a cloudy mass,
Or whiten in the wind, of waters blue
That from the distance sparkle through
Some woodland gap, and of a sky above,

Where one white cloud like a stray lamb doth
move.

V.

My childhood's earliest thoughts are linked
with thee;
The sight of thee calls back the robin's song,
Who, from the dark old tree
Beside the door, sang clearly all day long,
And I, secure in childish piety,
Listened as if I heard an angel sing
With news from heaven, which he could
bring
Fresh every day to my untainted ears
When birds and flowers and I were happy
peers.

VI.

How like a prodigal doth nature seem,
When thou, for all thy gold, so common art!
Thou teachest me to deem
More sacredly of every human heart,
Since each reflects in joy its scanty gleam
Of heaven, and could some wondrous secret show,
Did we but pay the love we owe,
And with a child's undoubting wisdom look
On all these living pages of God's book.

RHŒCUS.

I.

God sends his teachers unto every age,
To every clime, and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of Truth
Into the selfish rule of one sole race:
Therefore each form of worship that hath swayed
The life of man, and given it to grasp
The master-key of knowledge, reverence,
Infolds some germs of goodness and of right;
Else never had the eager soul, which loathes
The slothful down of pampered ignorance,
Found in it even a moment's fitful rest.

II.

There is an instinct in the human heart
Which makes that all the fables it hath coined,
To justify the reign of its belief
And strengthen it by beauty's right divine,
Veil in their inner cells a mystic gift,
Which, like the hazel twig, in faithful hands,
Points surely to the hidden springs of truth.
For, as in nature naught is made in vain,
But all things have within their hull of use
A wisdom and a meaning which may speak
Of spiritual secrets to the ear
Of spirit; so, in whatsoe'er the heart
Hath fashioned for a solace to itself,
To make its inspirations suit its creed,
And from the niggard hands of falsehood wring

Its needful food of truth, there ever is
A sympathy with Nature, which reveals,
Not less than her own works, pure gleams of light
And earnest parables of inward lore.
Hear now this fairy legend of old Greece,
As full of gracious youth and beauty still
As the immortal freshness of that grace
Carved for all ages on some Attic frieze.

III.

A youth named Rhœcus, wandering in the wood,
Saw an old oak just trembling to its fall,
And, feeling pity of so fair a tree,
He propped its gray trunk with admiring care,
And with a thoughtless footstep loitered on.
But, as he turned, he heard a voice behind
That murmured "Rhœcus!" 'T was as if the leaves,
Stirred by a passing breath, had murmured it,
And, while he paused bewildered, yet again
It murmured "Rhœcus!" softer than a breeze.
He started and beheld with dizzy eyes
What seemed the substance of a happy dream
Stand there before him, spreading a warm glow
Within the green glooms of the shadowy oak.
It seemed a woman's shape, yet far too fair
To be a woman, and with eyes too meek
For any that were wont to mate with gods.
All naked like a goddess stood she there,
And like a goddess all too beautiful

To feel the guilt-born earthliness of shame.
"Rhœcus, I am the Dryad of this tree,"
Thus she began, dropping her low-toned words
Serene, and full, and clear, as drops of dew,
"And with it I am doomed to live and die;
The rain and sunshine are my caterers,
Nor have I other bliss than simple life;
Now ask me what thou wilt, that I can give,
And with a thankful joy it shall be thine."

IV.

Then Rhœcus, with a flutter at the heart,
Yet, by the prompting of such beauty, bold,
Answered: "What is there that can satisfy
The endless craving of the soul but love?
Give me thy love, or but the hope of that
Which must be evermore my nature's goal."
After a little pause she said again,
But with a glimpse of sadness in her tone,
"I give it, Rhœcus, though a perilous gift;
An hour before the sunset meet me here."
And straightway there was nothing he could see
But the green glooms beneath the shadowy oak,
And not a sound came to his straining ears
But the low trickling rustle of the leaves,
And far away upon an emerald slope
The falter of an idle shepherd's pipe.

V.

Now, in those days of simpleness and faith,
Men did not think that happy things were dreams
Because they overstepped the narrow bourn

Of likelihood, but reverently deemed
Nothing too wondrous or too beautiful
To be the guerdon of a daring heart.
So Rhœcus made no doubt that he was blest,
And all along unto the city's gate
Earth seemed to spring beneath him as he walked,
The clear, broad sky looked bluer than its wont,
And he could scarce believe he had not wings,
Such sunshine seemed to glitter through his veins
Instead of blood, so light he felt and strange.

VI.

Young Rhœcus had a faithful heart enough,
But one that in the present dwelt too much,
And, taking with blithe welcome whatsoe'er
Chance gave of joy, was wholly bound in that,
Like the contented peasant of a vale,
Deemed it the world, and never looked beyond.
So, haply meeting in the afternoon
Some comrades who were playing at the dice,
He joined them, and forgot all else beside.

VII.

The dice were rattling at the merriest,
And Rhœcus, who had met but sorry luck,
Just laughed in triumph at a happy throw,
When through the room there hummed a yellow bee
That buzzed about his ear with down-dropped legs

As if to light. And Rhœcus laughed and said,
Feeling how red and flushed he was with loss,
"By Venus! does he take me for a rose?"
And brushed him off with rough, impatient hand.
But still the bee came back, and thrice again
Rhœcus did beat him off with growing wrath.
Then through the window flew the wounded bee,
And Rhœcus, tracking him with angry eyes,
Saw a sharp mountain-peak of Thessaly
Against the red disk of the setting sun,—
And instantly the blood sank from his heart,
As if its very walls had caved away.
Without a word he turned, and, rushing forth,
Ran madly through the city and the gate,
And o'er the plain, which now the wood's long shade,
By the low sun thrown forward broad and dim,
Darkened wellnigh unto the city's wall.

VIII.

Quite spent and out of breath he reached the tree,
And, listening fearfully, he heard once more
The low voice murmur "Rhœcus!" close at hand:
Whereat he looked around him, but could see
Naught but the deepening glooms beneath the oak.
Then sighed the voice, "O Rhœcus! nevermore
Shalt thou behold me or by day or night,
Me, who would fain have blessed thee with a love

More ripe and bounteous than ever yet
Filled up with nectar any mortal heart:
But thou didst scorn my humble messenger,
And sent'st him back to me with bruised wings
We spirits only show to gentle eyes,
We ever ask an undivided love,
And he who scorns the least of Nature's works
Is thenceforth exiled and shut out from all.
Farewell! for thou canst never see me more."

IX.

Then Rhœcus beat his breast, and groaned aloud,
And cried, "Be pitiful! forgive me yet
This once, and I shall never need it more!"
"Alas!" the voice returned, "'t is thou art blind,
Not I unmerciful; I can forgive,
But have no skill to heal thy spirit's eyes;
Only the soul hath power o'er itself."
With that again there murmured "Nevermore!"
And Rhœcus after heard no other sound,
Except the rattling of the oak's crisp leaves,
Like the long surf upon a distant shore,
Raking the sea-worn pebbles up and down.
The night had gathered round him: o'er the plain
The city sparkled with its thousand lights,
And sounds of revel fell upon his ear
Harshly and like a curse; above, the sky,
With all its bright sublimity of stars,
Deepened, and on his forehead smote the breeze:

Beauty was all around him and delight,
But from that eve he was alone on earth.

QUOTATIONS FROM LOWELL.

Get but the truth once uttered, and 'tis like
A star new-born that drops into its place,
And which, once circling in its placid round,
Not all the tumult of the earth can shake.

Life is a leaf of paper white
Whereon each one of us may write
His word or two, and then comes night;
Greatly begin! Though thou hast time
But for a line, be that sublime!
Not failure, but low aim, is crime.

Be noble! and the nobleness that lies
In other men, sleeping, but never dead,
Will rise in majesty to meet thine own.

And I honor the man who is willing to sink
Half his present repute for the freedom to think,
And when he has thought, be his cause strong or weak,
Will risk t'other half for the freedom to speak,
Caring naught for what vengeance the mob has in store,
Let that mob be the upper ten thousand or lower.

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